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OF WASHINGTON

WE ARE BECOMING A NATION AND ARE ADOPTING A CHRISTIAN POLICY.

A THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED IN WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 28, 1867.

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Psalm 72,—2-3-4.

He shall judge thy people wtih righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

This is a part of the description which God Himself has given us of a perfect government. It embraces several important particulars. It has one supreme controlling power. It is a centralized government. Its policy is based on the eternal right. It is stable, because righteousness and justice are the habitation of the throne. It affords perfect protection to the whole people, especially to the poor and needy, and it breaks in pieces the power of every oppressor.—It protects and rewards the good and faithful, it restrains and punishes the wicked.

This government will yet take the place of all others on earth as the ultimate outgrowth and fruit of the Gospel, as the political expression of the principles of Christ; and all governments now existing are right or wrong, profitable or injurious to humanity, according as they resemble this perfect Commonwealth of Jesus.

As followers of the Lord, we should be thankful for our American institutions exactly in proportion as they exhibit now the spirit of Christ, or tend to produce hereafter a perfect Christian state. Viewing in this light of the Bible the policy and institutions of our country, have we reason to be thankful to-day? I think so, and propose to set forth some of the reasons for this opinion.

We should be thankful that our manifest tendency is to become a nation, with a central power strong enough to control the whole, and protect the whole, and that we are passing from a lower to a higher form of national life. All the organizations of the universe have been constituted by God, upon the same general plan. Without exception, they have each a central controlling power that governs all, while every individual member has perfect freedom to act and expand in its own sphere to the full measure of its capacity—each part linked to every other, and all responsible to and guided by the Common Head. These are all symbols of the higher government of God over intelligent creatures; a government which I should call a perfect democracy, with an absolute central power at its head; a State in which every creature has entire freedom to pursue its happiness, and to perfect its nature in its own sphere within the limits prescribed by the Supreme Power that legislates for and governs all. To this perfectly free, yet centralized government of God, creation points by all its organic forms. In every part it symbolizes the government of God.

Even inorganic matter chrystalizes upon a centre, the one guiding atom giving shape and position to all the rest; but in living forms this idea is still more clearly express-

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ed. Life ever organizes itself upon a governing centre. Sever the connection between the parts and this central life power, and that is death; member falls away from member, moulders and disappears.

The plants that delight us with their graceful beauty have been unfolded each from its own central life germ, and that one power has held supreme control over all its growth, shaping every bud, and branch and flower, deciding the shape, the color, the fragrance, governing all, and yet each bud, and leaf and flower and ripened fruit has been free to perfect itself in its own sphere, while yielding obedience ever to the one supreme controlling life. Separate this living structure from its central life, and even the tough oak that the hurricane could not tear up, or the pine that a thousand winter storms could not break, perishes branch after branch, and then the great trunk trembles and totters and falls, a disorganized dead mass that crumbles and disappears.

The animal organization affords a still better illustration. Suppose a perfect bodily structure of a brute, or a man. Place every bone in position, every muscle where it belongs, and every blood vessel and every nerve in its own proper place, and without the central life, it would not be an organization, there would be neither sensation nor motion. Could we impart to each member a separate life, the body would be wrenched asunder with convulsions, but give the proper controlling, guiding life, to which each member yields prompt and certain obedience, and it becomes a perfect organization, a thing of harmonious activity, of beauty and of power. Every living body with its one supreme law-giving head is a beautiful symbol of the grander organization of the government of God.

The heavens, also, in their glorious order, present us with an emblem of the same great truth. The starry hosts of the Lord are organized upon governing centres.

The Sun is our monarch star. The planets of our system, each moving freely in its own orbit, are all controlled by the one central orb. But He, in turn, yields obedience to a higher power, and with all his train, moves round a remote centre, and thus the heavenly order rises, group above group, and system above system, until the final centre that governs all, is found in the City and Throne of God. The existence of different orders of arch-angels shows that the heavenly hosts are organized upon the same plan, the different bodies obeying a central ruler, and Christ the head of all.

This one idea then governs every organized structure in creation and God himself has supplied us with no other form of organized existence, whether in the political structure or in the living body. It combines the two ideas of perfect freedom for the subject or citizen, with supreme control in the central governing power; and I repeat that this is the only idea of government presented in the whole universe of God. Whether we look to his own vast empire as a whole, or study the different parts, it is everywhere the same—and when applied to a human government it produces a perfect Christian democracy with a supreme power for its head.

This was the exact form which Christ the King of the Jews prescribed, for the Hebrew State. Every Jew was perfectly free in his own proper sphere, free to do right, the only liberty to which any creature is entitled, free to seek his happiness and his full development as a man according to the law of the Supreme power that governed and guided all. It was a Theocratic Democracy. No people on earth have ever enjoyed so true a freedom, or such great prosperity as the Jews, so long as they were satisfied with this perfect government of God.

A true life then, whether of a living creature, or a nation, ever organizes itself upon one supreme controlling power, and without this a government, a nation, is impossible.

Life organizes and concentrates itself upon a governing head; death destroys this

central life; separates member from member, and leaves the whole a ruin.

The question of slavery, great as it was, was by no means the most important one of the war. That concerned directly the state of four millions of people. There was another that involved not only their destiny, but that of the thirty millions of white men. That question was, whether the body politic should be torn—member from member, and left with no common life, or connecting bond, to perish, each in convulsions; or, whether this great people should pass out of their half organized condition into the higher nobler forms of a free national life, grand enough for the great continent which God has made our inheritance.

We may well thank God that the rebellion was made on that great issue, and that while slavery was destroyed as one of the necessities of the war, the grander decision was also virtually reached; that their shall be on this continent one American nation.

The national sentiment is daily growing stronger, nor do the late elections give any evidence to the contrary. Side issues may be presented to embarrass or hinder, but out of the ruins of old systems crumbled by the shock of war, there are rising around us like a continent from beneath the waves, the great outlines of an American nationalty.

It requires very little reflection to see where the central and supreme power of this nation must be. There can be no tripartite division of sovereignty between a Legislature, an Executive, and a Court. The law-making power is of necessity supreme, the power which prescribes the law, the rule of life is, of course, the controlling power. A Court decides what the law is, and the Executive enforces its provisions. It is said the Legislature must be controlled by the Constitution. The time is coming, and even now is, when the American people will ask what is right, and what do our present necessities require, and if they find a wrong thing in the Constitution they will remove it, and if the Constitution made for us while we were young, is now too small and unfitting, we shall enlarge and change it, or get an entirely new political garment suited to us as we now are, and to this present time. The age of the formation of the Constitution has passed with nearly all its former usages and instruments of every kind. The Constitution was a political machine, invented then, and the genius of our people, that has cast aside nearly all the tools and processes of that time, and given us far better ones, may invent a new and better machine for government.

We do not use the old sickle and scythe because our fathers did, nor retain the old slow coaches in which they rode, nor the old guns with which they fought, nor the ships on which they sailed. Many grave questions have already arisen which the Constitution cannot settle, because our fathers were not prophets, and could not forsee the wants of a coming age.

The constitution was made for this narrow strip of land between the Alleghanies and the sea. We must now form a government for an almost boundless continent. We must have a constitution fitted to this new time, which can protect and elevate humanity in all this North America, and in our American Islands of the sea, a constitution that can meet all the wants and arrange round one common centre all the interests of a people dwelling between the two great oceans, the isthmus and the poles, and shape them to the forms of a christian nation. We may well thank God that we are tending so swiftly towards a nationality grander and mightier than earth has ever seen, one which will combine and express the will of a hundred millions of educated people, and whose political institutions, whose science, literature, and art, no less than its churches and religious associations, shall form one noble system of christian civilization, one consecrated to Christ and humanity.

We will have an American nation because we want an American national char-

acter. No aggregation of mere States could create this. Loyalty to the true national idea is a far more ennobling feeling than the mere local attachment to a State. The last can make a partizan narrow and bigoted, it may produce a New Englander, a Virginian, but the other will create Americans, with a continental type of character that respects itself as an original creation of God designed for this Western World. We will have an American nation in order that we may wield a great nation's power, because that, and that alone, will secure for us peace with Europe, until Europe itself is changed. Let us cultivate all friendly relations with every other people, and especially with our mother land. I hope we shall ever rejoice to honor all the noble men of England who have proved themselves our friends and the friends of freedom and of right, but they unfortunately are not the England with which we have to deal. The men who control the Government of England are of another spirit, and we shall make a dangerous mistake if we are led to believe that the English Government cherishes towards this Republic any feeling of friendship. The political, the commercial, the ecclesiastical, the most powerful literary forces of England are against us still, and these control Great Britain.

We would have an American nation that we may also have an American art. I cannot believe that the human mind stopped short and finally, thousands of years ago with the beautiful creations of Greece. Christianity shall yet glorify art, and where should we more naturally look for a new era in art, for original creations of genius than on this continental theatre, and under the influence of unshackled American thought. We would have a national literature, which, while it acknowledges all it owes to the thought and culture of England, shall be the expression of American thought in American forms of speech.

Last Sabbath a man asked me if Mr. Hall was to preach at the Capitol? I answered, yes. Is he an Englishman? he asked. Yes. *Does he speak American?* I think the questioner was not himself an American. His questions however may yet have a real significance. The English language is growing because it is a living language. It is not now what it was two hundred years ago, and there may yet be here a nobler, purer, stronger form of that English tongue, and it may be pertinent to inquire of a Briton whether he speaks American.

For the same reason, and in the same spirit, that I said a few days since in this place to the black man, be a true independent black man, would I say to all my countrymen, white or black, be independent, self-respecting Americans, and aid to build here a true American nation. It would perhaps be well for us to remember that in our hour of weakness and distress England sent to us no eloquent missionaries of peace. Fleets of swift steamers bearing aid and comfort to our foe were the visitors then, the mailed Warrior frigate was to be sent to this Potomac then, bearing England's menace, and it was after we had created a navy that could defy her own, it was after one of our new war ships lay in the Thames, which, as Englishmen admitted, could have destroyed any ship of their navy, it was after that English Alabama went to the bottom under the fire of the Kearsage, it was after it was found that American artillery could smash the sides of her strongest iron-clads, that England discovered how much she loves America. I would strengthen that affection and render it perpetual, by creating here an American nation so strong that friendship for us would be safer than hostility. If on the bills we have rendered to England for those ships whose conflagration lighted up the seas we would write received payment in full in friendly words, it would be a very pleasant thing for England, but would it increase the confidence of the

American merchants in the justice and protection of their Government?

We would have an American nation presented unto this people in its grandeur, and glory, and power, in its beneficence and justice, until the national life should become so sacred and so precious that no man could lift his hand in rebellion against it, and escape by any possibility a traitor's proper doom.

This leads me to observe that in order to fulfil its great mission the American nation must have the characteristics of the government described in the text. It must execute justice against the wicked, and it must defend the weak. Towards this also we are tending, and for it we should be thankful. We may give to this opinion a more general form and say that we should thank God that the principles of Christ are becoming more and more a controlling power in the policy of the American Government. I will endeavor to show that this is true by the mention of several particulars. If we go back no farther than the beginning of the rebellion, and study the discussions of public affairs by our leading statesmen, we shall find scarcely an allusion made to moral or religious considerations as an element in the debate. Politics and religion were almost entirely sundered, and the gravest questions ever presented to a nation were too often discussed and decided, as if there were no God to whom nations are responsible, and no external right by which to measure our actions. The question asked was, not what is just, what does the law of God demand, but how shall our Union be preserved? The preservation of the Union was exalted above justice and mercy, above human rights, and even the throne of God. And from this practical atheism God brought us back step by step by the terrible scourgings of war. By blow after blow that made the nation reel, we were forced back to the recognition of God. We were taught that human rights were more sacred than even the Union, and that human constitutions cannot annihilate the brotherhood of man. When the war closed, God was re-enthroned in the conscience and intellect of the nation if not in the heart, and the people had been taught in solemn lessons the necessity and majesty of law, and the propriety of penalty and punishment as a shield for the virtuous and loyal. They had learned that mercy without justice, is weakness and cruelty. The elementary principles of God's own government had entered not only into public thought, but into the policy of the nation. The American people, during the war, made long strides towards the position of a Christian nation.

We come here to what I consider a cause for special thanksgiving; the manner in which since the war, the nation has been saved from an attempt at utter demoralization on the one hand, and in which Christian principles on the other side, have been firmly asserted in every great measure of policy. The first step in corrupting the public conscience of the land, was the effort of a great party, first to weaken, and then to remove the feeling so intense during the war, that the rebellion was a crime, and that leading traitors should be punished.

First, we heard soft words about the Christ-like character of mercy, of the unchristian character of what was called revenge, of the beauty of that benevolence which would repair the breach and heal the wounds of the war. All this meant forgiveness of the unrepenting and bitter rebel, persecution for the loyal white, and the perpetual degradation of the blacks. This was not clearly seen at first. Then this cruel and corrupting mercy was exercised, and on every side rebels started up relieved of all disabilities, more insolent than ever, glorying in their crimes, and styling themselves heroes. The demand was proudly made that they should be freed from every imputation of wrong, and restored to their original position in the Government, with more than their former power, with the black race still under their feet. It was startling to consider to what an extent these efforts had corrupted the public mind; how the crime of

rebellion in the minds of thousands, first lost its bloody hue, and then was bleached to purity, and then was tinged with glory. During the war, indignation against the rebels and a just horror of their great crime, was so great as to overbear in great measure the pride and prejudice of race, and the loyal blacks were esteemed better and more worthy than the rebel whites; and this was christian justice. But in proportion as the guilt of rebellion was diminished in the minds of the people, and the rebels were talked of and thought of, only as our Southern brethren, not as criminals that had reddened the land with blood, and wet it with tears, and piled it with corpses, in that same proportion the exiled devils of pride of race, and prejudice against blacks, returned to the house they had temporarily left, and the extent of this vitiating process, this return towards the godless state of our politics before the war, is measured by the late elections.

This was and is our danger. In this light only can we measure the gratitude we ought to feel to those who have erected and held firm unto this present, the only barrier to this sweeping tide of moral ruin. Every great measure of the 39th and 40th Congress has tended to hold the nation steady on the firm basis of Christian principles. Every one has been an assertion in some form of the great doctrine of Christ, and for the success of these measures thus far, we should be as Christians, especially thankful to God. All these measures have been directed to two great ends. First, that treason should not pass without some punishment that should mark it as a crime against God and man! Second, that every man in this land should be invested with, and secured in every just civil and political right, and this is to place our Government, thus far, on the basis of the Gospel. To this extent, these measures make us a Christian nation.

The Civil Rights bill, and the granting and securing the right of suffrage to the blacks in this District, were a clear and decisive assertion of the equality and brotherhood of men, as set forth by Christ Himself; it is the formal introduction of a new principle into American legislation; and in the so-called reconstruction measures, this principle was extended over all the South. But these enactments also asserted and do still maintain another great Christian doctrine: the necessity of penal justice. It was beyond the power of these legislators to arrest and punish the leaders of the rebellion in the usual way, but they have done what they could to prevent the utter confounding of right and wrong; they refused to admit that there is no crime in treason; and they decided that some of the chief instigators of this rebellion should for a time, have no share in the control of that Government which they sought to destroy. It was a bold and manly setting forth of Christian justice; it was a declaration of the sacredness of Government, of the value of law, of the worth of loyalty, of the guilt of treason; and I thank God that unrepenting, bitter disloyalty, stands before the world to-day wearing this brand of its infamy;—this proof that the nation retains yet so much of moral soundness. True, these measures placed great power in the hands of ignorant and inexperienced black men. but we have given the same to equally ignorant white men, and we cannot discriminate against a race, and that, too, was done in the spirit of the Gospel. Besides, when the rebellion forced upon us the choice between restoring political power to the man who was still a traitor in heart, though educated, and giving it to the true-hearted and loyal black, the choice could not have been other than it was, without placing our necks beneath the rebel heel;—without trampling all justice down, and insulting the very Government of God.

We shall all rejoice when every white man, through heartfelt-loyalty shall regain all the rights which treason has forfeited—

For these reasons, friends, we ought to thank God for the influence which the principles of Christ are exerting upon the measures of our Government, and we may still battle on for the right; trusting that the time will yet come, when this glorious Gos-

pel of Jesus shall vitalize, and purify, and elevate, and control the whole policy of the nation, and thus become the land of Immanuel.—

Another exhibition of the Christianity of of this country for which we ought to be thankful, is the result of the application of the Gospel to public policy; first in freeing, and then in elevating the black race. No missionary effort of the world has achieved so sudden and so great a success as that in behalf of the blacks of this land. It has brought a new race upon the theatre of American life, and all possible influences are being exerted to cherish this newborn people, and bring them to the maturity of manhood. The rapidity with which they are rising in society, is without a parallel in the history of man. The prosperity of their schools, the increasing number of scholars, and the swift progress which the pupils are making, gives most cheering promise for the future. In their churches, and in every organization which they have formed, there is the same gratifying success, and there is every reason to believe that they will develope a new type of Christian civilization which may improve in some respects our own.

We may well thank God for this birth and growth of a people—

And now, let me briefly inquire by what measures we are most likely to succeed in making this, indeed, a Christian nation—

We can only do it by holding steadfastly to the right. Any backward step, any yielding of principle, any measure dictated by mere political expediency, will now surely defeat the party of freedom. Any party that fails to insist at all hazards upon securing to all men, every civil and political right, will be withered up in the indignant breath of the Lord. Faith in God—in the right—in all humanity—must be watch words on the banner of any party that would succeed. Boldness, courage to dare and do the right, to execute justice, are also necessary to the success of any party, a weak irresolute, faltering leadership, the people will not follow. The party that carried the country through the war, that won unfading honor by its moral victories as well as on the battle field, would be disgraced now before the world, by yielding one single position which it has gained, or if it fails to seize every advantage, and justly, properly within its reach. A little irresolution, one backward step, and such is human nature that it will be deserted by the people. Enthusiasm for a great and true idea, steady adherence to a noble purpose will surely triumph in the end; because God himself is pledged to the true and righteous cause.

Again, to secure success for the cause of Christian freedom, we must have a free pulpit, to apply the principles of Christ to the policy of the Government, until our whole political structure is a glorious temple illuminated by the light of the Gospel. The best hope of the country rests on the fact that American politics are becoming inseparably twined with morals and religion; to sever them would be to give the state over to practical atheism—

A very startling exhibition of this doctrine has lately been made in the assumption that mere moral delinquency forms no ground of proceeding against a public officer; that a man may use the whole power of high position to obstruct the progress of Christian civilization, and to confound those eternal distinctions of right and wrong which God Himself has established, that he may sear the public conscience, and corrupt the heart of the people; that he can cherish vice and discourage virtue, support the traitor and punish the loyal—that an officer of this Government can do all this, and yet constitute no ground for proceeding against him: that he may sin at will against God, morality and religion, with impunity unless in addition to this he violates some statute law of the United States. This is virtually to deny the authority of God; it is to deny that this Government has any moral basis; it is to deny that this is a Christian state; it is practical Atheism.

Finaly, we need a church that will enter upon the especial work of evangelizing the masses; the fact that millions in this land could be persuaded to vote as they did on such issues as were presented at the late elections, should startle every Christian. It shows where the great field of Christian effort lies, among the people, among the poor. They must be Evangilized or we shall be lost. We neeed churches that will go down as Christ did to the lowest state of society: churches which while they seek not to confound distinctions that God Himself has established, shall make no discrimination against race, color, or condition; but with the Almighty power of the Gospel, place themselves under the whole broad mass of humanity, and lift it to the high level of Christian civilization.—

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